

James Memorial Higher Secondary School

D. FRANKLIN WATSON

D. Franklin Watson has been principal of James Memorial Higher Secondary School since 2018.

James Memorial Higher Secondary School is a co-education boarding and day school established in 1909 at Prakasapuram, Tirunelveli, in Tamilnadu, that is operated by Southeast India Union Section.

Early History

Around 1906, a sect of people known as Hindu Christians¹ were found in Tirunelveli, Tamilnadu, who kept the Seventh-day Sabbath. In December 1907, Judson James, accompanied by John L. Shaw and G. F. Enoch, visited them, and on March 17, 1908, James and his wife moved in to work among them. Mrs. James always had a keen interest in the education of girls. She soon gathered six teenage girls and hired Mrs. Joseph to instruct them. The students met in one room of their bungalow and on the verandah. No fees were charged.²

Judson James also conducted Bible studies on the verandah that attracted many.³ As more families joined the Adventists, their children were expelled from the schools operated by other local missions, and it became necessary to operate a regular school.⁴ On November 1, 1909, a school was established in a rented building with 35 students and two tutors. Mrs. Joseph's sister (who later married the pioneer Edward D. Thomas) was also employed. Within a month, the enrolment had increased to 60.⁵

Gentry and Bertha Lowry, who arrived from the United States in December 1909, joined the team in Prakasapuram in 1910 and took over administration of the school. By then, the fee was one anna. Gentry Lowry prepared Bible lessons for the school and then built a schoolhouse of mud and brick. The Hindu Christians donated a small plot of land of about two acres for the school. More land was purchased, and more school rooms were constructed including a girls' hostel and a boys' hostel, almost covering the property with buildings. Then the mission purchased more land for farming.⁶ The next teachers to join the staff were Mr. Samuel and Miss Ragammal.⁷ By 1913, the enrolment had reached 100— 68 boys and 32 girls, forming six standards under the instruction of five teachers and a headmaster. Among the five teachers, one had been baptized and others were committed Christians.⁸

When the Southern Asia Division was organized 1919-1920, the school was renamed the Tamil Mission School since it served the entire Tamil Mission of the South India Union. In 1928, the inspector of government schools visited the school and invited the manager to have it registered with the government and thus obtain recognition, but the school's workers consistently refrained from associating with what they referred to as worldly education. This was truly a mission school, and every year, several students were baptized and joined the Church.⁹ In 1939, the school was upgraded to the tenth standard level, and the name was changed to the Prakasapuram Higher Secondary School.¹⁰

Years of Transition

In 1943, the principal asked the Union for extra finance on the basis that the school no longer had land for income-generating industries as other secondary boarding schools did.¹¹ In response, the Union announced plans to relocate the school and said that it was not advisable to spend money on buildings at Prakasapuram.¹² The school was also downgraded to an elementary boarding school from 1944-1946. It appears that high school students were sent to the Lowry Memorial High School at Krishnarajapuram.¹³ In 1946, high school standards were restored, and the school was renamed "James High School" to honor the first Adventist missionary to Prakasapuram.¹⁴

Following up on relocation of the school, in November 1950, the Division Committee authorized the South India Union to purchase 63 acres near Tanjore for the relocation of the Tamil High School "presently at Prakasapuram."¹⁵ The Tamil High School was renamed the "E. D. Thomas Memorial High School" in honor of the pioneer (who had passed away in 1952 while the buildings were being constructed). The school re-opened in Kudikadu near Tanjore on July 30, 1953.¹⁶

What was left in Prakasapuram was a small day school only for students of the local church. In 1954, the Union gave permission to the school to open the fifth standard on the condition that it did not incur any cost to the Union.¹⁷ The small school had challenges with recognition due to the low enrolment and unqualified teachers.¹⁸

The South India Union took an action in Jan 1956 to recommend a "Prakasapuram Boarding School" on the basis of: (1) The cluster of 40 churches in the Prakasapuram area, (2) The E. D. Thomas school could not be recognized for both high school and elementary school, (3) Students from Prakasapuram were not going to Kudikadu, but instead were enrolling in other local schools, (4) A boarding school would increase the enrolment of the day school and facilitate recognition, (5) It would fulfill a promise to the members at Prakasapuram that an elementary boarding school would be established when the school moved to Kudikadu, (6) The buildings at Prakasapuram were deteriorating while not being utilized, and (7) This would reassure the members of Prakasapuram that the welfare of their children was being considered.¹⁹ Thus boarding students were taken in, but only for the third and fourth standards. This began in June 1956 under the principal V. D. Koilpillai.²⁰

Later Developments

In 1977, the institution commenced offering some high school level classes. In 1987, the matriculation board granted permission to start tenth matriculation, and in 1989, the Tamil Nadu government gave permission to start Plus One classes. However, the school faced problems since the government board S. S. L. C. examinations were being conducted on a Sabbath. Meanwhile, the South India Union recommended that the school affiliate with the ICSE board.²¹ Students were instructed to enroll either for the ICSE exams or for the Denomination's Division exams. In 1989, the Union recommended the school for evaluation with a view to offering the Division School a leaving Certificate.²² Those who completed the DSLC exams could proceed to Spicer College.²³

In 1989, four classrooms and two labs were built in the Thambakara block. In 1990, a new boys' hostel was built opposite to the old boys' hostel. In 1991, World Vision of India constructed a new-look kitchen.

In 1999, a new elementary block was built and inaugurated to replace the 60-year old building. As the number of higher secondary students increased, the need to update the labs arose. With the help of multiple donors, labs were erected on top of high school building in 2004. In 2010, another new boys' hostel was built, donated, and dedicated by the Ponraj Maharajan family. In 2013, the Thirteenth-Sabbath Sabbath School offering funded a beautiful building constructed with eight classrooms for ICSE students.

In 2019, the oldest administrative building was renovated and inaugurated. The building was dedicated to help the younger generation understand and appreciate the work of the pioneers of our work better. The old architecture was blended with a new look as a tribute to the significance of James Memorial School. This reconstruction was funded by the Ponraj Maharajan family.

Principals/Managers

Tamil Day and Boarding School: J. S. James (1909-1913); E. D. Thomas (1914-1920).

Tamil Mission School: E. D. Thomas (1921-1923).

Tamil Intermediate School: E. D. Thomas (1924-1927).

Tamil High School: H. W. Carter (1928); E. D. Willmott (1929-1931).

Prakasapuram High School: C. A. Randolph (1931-1933); H. W. Carter (1933-1935); O. A. Skau (1935-1937); G. Gurubatham (1937-1939); V. D. Koilpillai (1939-1941).

Prakasapuram Secondary Boarding School: V. D. Koilpillai (1941-1942); M. I. Pakkianathan (1942-1945); M. D. Kodan (1945).

Prakasapuram Elementary Boarding School: I. R. Thomas (1945-1947).

James Secondary Boarding School: I. R. Thomas (1947-1948); G. Gurabatham (1949 -1950); O. S. Matthews (1950-1952); E. L. Rollins (1952-1953).

James Elementary (Church) School: (1953-56).

James Elementary Boarding School: V. D. Koilpillai (1956); D. Monickam Dhason (1956-58); D. P. Thomas (1958-1959); Y. G. Thomas (1959-1962); D. P. Thomas (1962-1964); Vellachamy Joseph (1966-1968); C. P. Jonahs (1968-1970); H. Theodore (1970-1971) Y. R. Samraj (1971-1973); K. I. Varghese (1973-1976).

James Memorial High School: Moses E. Joseph (1976-1977); P. T. Gregory (1977); T. J. Lazarus (1977-1985); Ebenezer Samuel (1985); K. Arthur Immanuel (1985-1987); S. Sundaram (June 1987-1989).

James Memorial Higher Secondary School: S. Sundaram (June 1989-1991); V. K. Baby (1991- 1993); K. N. Varghese (1993); R. John (1993-1996); K. Chelladurai (1996-1998); R.T. Jeevanandam (1998-2001); R. Sundersingh Rajan (2001-2002); S. Edison Samuel, (2002-2003); T. Sathanandam (2003-2004); S. Ambrose (2004-2010); K. Wilson Daniel (2010-2011); P. Thangaraj Ponniah (2011-2015); K. Arulandam Koil (2015-2017); K. Boominathan, (2017-2018); D. Franklin Watson (2018-).

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NOTES

1. To learn more about this sect see, for example, Gordon E. Christo, "Hindu Christians and Adventists in India," *Encyclopedia of Seventh-day Adventists*, accessed September 14, 2021, <https://encyclopedia.adventist.org/article?id=CIBJ&highlight=Hindu|Christians|and|Adventists|in|India>.
2. J. S. James, "Tinneveli, South India," *ARH*, January 6, 1910, 13.
3. J. S. James, "South India," *Eastern Tidings*, July 1909, 4.
4. J. S. James, "Southern India," *Eastern Tidings*, December 1909, 3.
5. Ibid.
6. Mrs. G. G. Lowry, "History of the Tamil Schools," *Eastern Tidings*, December 1, 1952, 03.
7. J. S. James, "Tinneveli," South India," *ARH*, January 6, 1910, 13.
8. J. S. James, "Among Tamil Villages," *Eastern Tidings*, January 1913, 31.
9. E. M. Meleen, "Tamil Mission High School," *Eastern Tidings*, August 15, 1930, 3-4.
10. "10th Std for Prasapuram School," Minutes of the South India Union Committee, May 18-19, 1939, #3921.
11. "Request from Prakasapuram School," Minutes of the South India Union Committee, June 10, 1943, #4801, 1353.
12. "Prakasapuram School," Minutes of the South India Union Committee, December 12, 1943, #4836, 1361.
13. See "Request for Funds from Tamil School Reserves," Minutes of the South India Union Committee, March 13, 1946, # 5490, 1547.
14. I. R. Thomas, "James High School, Prakasapuram," *Eastern Tidings*, October 15, 1946, 7.
15. "Relocation of Tamil High School," Minutes of the Southern Asia Division Committee, November 7, 1950, #12216; and "Tamil High School Relocation," Minutes of the Southern Asia Division Committee, November 22, 1950, #12257.
16. O. O. Mattison, "A Dream Come True," *Eastern Tidings*, October 1, 1953, 6.
17. "Fifth Standard at Prakasapuram," Minutes of the South India Union Committee, March 2, 1954, 9126, 2565.
18. "Prakasam School Recognition," Minutes of the South India Union Committee, March 23, 1955, #9824, 2735.

19. "Prakasapuram Boarding School," Minutes of the South India Union Committee, January 5, 1956, #56-102, 35-36.

20. Monickam Dhasan, *Southern Asia Tidings*, June 15, 1957, 8.

21. The Council for the Indian Certificate of Secondary Education is operated by Christians and is affiliated with Cambridge University. Adventists are a part of this organization. Classes and exams typically operate Monday to Friday.

22. "James School Evaluation," Minutes of the South India Union Committee, April 10-11, 1989, #98-75.

23. *James Memorial School Record Book and School Annual Reports 1989-2020*.

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